

**Exodus pt. 50**  
**A Nation of Priests**  
**Exodus 28:1 - 43**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Today as we continue our study of the book of Exodus, we come to chapter 28. The first half of Exodus dealt with the story of God delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian slavery. The second half establishes God's covenant with the people through the giving of the Law and the construction of the Tabernacle. Today our study brings us to another vital aspect of God's covenant relationship with the people: the formation and organization of the priestly order.
- B. As new covenant believers we may be tempted to think that since we no longer require priests that this passage has no application for us. However, there are two massively important New Testament truths that are rooted in this Old Testament reality. I'd like to share them with you here at the beginning so that you can know where I am heading.
  - 1. God's Servants are Priests
    - a) "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5 - 6)
    - b) God desired that the whole nation of Israel would be "a kingdom of priests" before Him. He wanted the entire nation to spread His blessings and advance His kingdom. But then He established a priestly order through the tribe of Levi - particularly the sons of Aaron. The Hebrews would not be able to fulfill God's desire for a nation of priests.
    - c) 1 Peter 2:9 tells us that it is God's covenant people in Christ that fulfill this promise. So as we talk about this passage about the levitical priests we should keep in mind that we, the church, are the ultimate fulfillment of the priestly order.
  - 2. God's Son is the Ultimate Priest
    - a) Even more important is the reality that the New Testament teaches us that Jesus is the ultimate High Priest. Jesus does what the thousands of earthly priests could never accomplish. He provided atonement that actually makes people right before God "once and for all."
    - b) So, like everything in the Old Testament, we should consider what truths this passage teaches us about Jesus.

**II. The Chosen Priesthood**

- A. "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me - Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Arron's sons." (Exodus 28:1)
  - 1. Remember that God said in chapter 19,
  - 2. "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5 - 6)
  - 3. God desired the entire nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests. But notice that their ability to be that is conditioned on whether or not they "obey God's voice" and "keep His covenant." When you study the Old Testament you find that they chronically fail to do both. In fact, in a few chapters they will be worshiping a golden calf.

4. So God chooses a select group out of the nation: the Sons of Aaron from the Tribe of Levi. They are set apart to be priests before God. Sadly, these priests, like the nation, will fail to be good and godly as well.
    - a) Aaron will be involved in the golden calf incident
    - b) His sons Nadab and Elihu will be killed for placing “strange fire” on God’s altar - that is using God’s altar to worship false gods
    - c) Much later the corrupt priesthood is directly connected to Israel’s worship of false gods which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Great Captivity.
- B. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9 - 10)
1. Notice that Peter says exactly what Moses says, God chooses His priests. Peter says we are a “chosen race.” When you study the New Testament you see that we are chosen “in Christ.”
  2. All of God’s people in the church are called to be priests. All of God’s people are called to be holy and to proclaim God’s goodness and story. All of God’s people are called to be servants, ministers, and evangelists. The church is meant to be the fulfillment of God’s desire to have a nation of priests.
    - a) I think it is worth considering how the church’s failure to be a holy nation of priests has had a ripple effect on the world around us. For too long we have embraced a form of “churchianity” where pastors and other “professionals” are solely responsible for ministry. Christianity is not a spectator’s sport. God desires and deserves all of His children anointed by His Spirit, walking in His ways, and advancing His kingdom. Only then can the church regain lost ground. Only then can we see revival. Only then can we see the world around us dramatically changed for the glory of God.
  3. Remember that God’s desire was that Israel would be a nation of priests if they obeyed His voice and kept His covenant. We should take seriously that our ability to be a nation of priests for Jesus is also tied to our obedience and covenant keeping.
  4. We should look at the failures of the nation of Israel and the levitical priests in the Old Testament as a cautionary tale which warns us of mistakes to avoid.
- C. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’; just as He says also in another passage, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’ (Hebrews 5:1 - 6)

### III. The Clothing of the Priesthood

- A. “You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me. These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me.” (Exodus 28:4) (Exodus 28:2 - 4)
- B. “In serving God and the people, the high priest wore seven pieces of clothing: undergarments (v. 42 - 43); a white inner robe (‘coat’; v. 39); a blue robe over that, with bells and pomegranates on the hem (v. 31 - 35); the ephod, a sleeveless garment of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet held together by a jeweled clasp on each shoulder (v. 6 - 8); a girdle at the waist (v. 8); a jeweled breastplate, held in place on the ephod by golden chains attached to the shoulder clasps (v. 9 - 30); and a white linen turban (v. 39) with a golden plate on it that said ‘Holy to the Lord’ (v. 36)” (Wiersbe, pg. 240)
- C. There are three words that God uses to describe the priests clothing:
1. Holy
    - a) The word holy literally means “set apart” or “special” These clothes were not to be worn every day by just anyone. Only the priests could wear them and only when they were serving in the temple.
  2. Glory
    - a) “The word translated ‘glory’ is *kavod*. More literally, it means ‘weighty,’ and thus it refers to the gravity of the priestly office. There was something glorious about the high priest’s calling, and this was displayed by the special grandeur of his clothes.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 824)
  3. Beauty
    - a) The priestly clothing was beautiful and elegant. No one in all of Israel was dressed as the priests were.
    - b) Their clothes used the same colors and materials as the tabernacle and its furniture.
    - c) “It was almost as if the high priest ‘embodied the tabernacle.’ Anyone who saw him immediately recognized that he belonged there. The holiness, glory, and beauty of his apparel associated him with God’s sacred space.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 824)
- D. As God’s priests, our lives should also be holy, glorious, and beautiful.
1. God calls us to be holy as He is holy.
    - a) The Greek word for church literally means, “The called out ones.” We are set apart, special.
  2. God calls us to share in the glory of Christ.
    - a) In this life, we reflect Jesus’ glory as “lights in the world.”
    - b) In the next life the Bible tells us that we will even share in Jesus’ glory.
  3. God calls us to be beautiful.
    - a) Just as anyone who saw the priests knew that they belonged in the tabernacle by the way they dressed, anyone who sees us should know that we belong with Jesus by our godly conduct and character.
- E. Certainly all of these words would describe the Lord Jesus as well.

#### IV. The Charge of the Priesthood

##### A. Serve God

1. God says that these priests are “to minister as priests to Him.” (Exodus 28:1)
2. “The Lord’s words ‘to minister unto Me’ are used five times in these two chapters. [...]. To be sure, the priests ministered to the people, but their first obligation was to minister to the Lord and please Him.” (Wiersbe, pg. 240)
3. The first responsibility of any priest is to serve God. The priests were responsible to light the lamps on the golden lampstand, handle the showbread, keep the incense burning, and offer sacrifices on the altar.
4. In the new covenant all believers are supposed to be priests. We are to serve God. We are to worship Him and serve Him however we can, whenever we can, and wherever we can.
5. And of course, Jesus, as our perfect High Priest, lived a life fully surrendered to the Father’s will. The Father could say both at the beginning and end of Jesus’ earthly ministry that He was well pleased in His Son, who spoke what the Father said, did what the Father commanded, and never disobeyed a single commandment.

##### B. Serve the People

1. The priests served the people in two primary ways.
  - a) Representing the people before God
    - (1) As I mentioned, the priests’ first responsibility was to serve God. In their service to Yahweh perhaps the greatest responsibility was in managing the various sacrifices. Each sacrifice had its own purpose and occasion and ritual. But all of them were meant to either mend or celebrate God’s relationship with the people. But the priests did not only represent the people before God through the sacrifices.
    - (2) “Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually. (Exodus 28:29)
    - (3) The names of the twelve tribes are on the priestly garments in two places. We see them here on the breastplate and they also appear on the “shoulder pieces of the ephod” mentioned in verse 12.
    - (4) “Consider the spiritual of these inscriptions. The twelve tribes of Israel were camping in the wilderness, living in a giant city of tents organized by tribes, with three tribes camping at each of the four points of the compass. At the center of it all was the tabernacle - the tent where God was. And when the high priest entered that Holy Place, he wore the tribal names of Israel on his shoulders. This showed that the high priest represented the people before God. Whenever the high priest put on his ceremonial robes, he lifted the people onto his shoulders and carried them into the presence of God.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 824)
    - (5) As a nation of priests, we too should be representing people before God.
    - (6) We are instructed to “[make] entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, [...] on behalf of all men [because God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1 & 4)
  - b) Guiding the people of God

- (1) You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually." (Exodus 28:29 - 30)
- (a) You'll notice a couple of words you likely aren't overly familiar with: Trim and Thummim. Simply put these were some kind of stone or gem that would be used by the priests to determine what God's will was. For example, some believe that they were a pair of stones, one black and the other white that the priests could use similarly to casting a dice or drawing straws.
- (b) No one knows exactly what the Urim and Thummim were. As far as I know the Bible never explicitly tells us. However, they were used to determine God's will by the priests for the people throughout the Old Testament.
- (2) Today the primary way that we can know God's will is to study the Word of God, the Bible. As priests we should live out God's principles and obey His commandments to the best of our ability. And we also should share God's truth with anyone who will listen.
- (3) "If we had a simple infallible method of determining the will of God [...] we probably wouldn't pray as much, search the Scriptures as much, or humble ourselves as much as we do today as we seek God's direction. But seeking and doing God's will is the way we grow in the Lord, and sharing in the process is as much a blessing as knowing the results." (Wiersbe, pg. 241)

## V. The Concern of the Priesthood

- A. "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. There shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, like the opening of a coat of mail, so that it will not be torn. You shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet material, all around on it Shem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe. It shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and it thinking shall be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the Lord, so that he will not die." (Exodus 28:31 - 35)
- B. It has been said that the high priest wore bells so that those outside of the Holy of Holies would know if he was still moving in service to God. A wicked high priest would be killed by the holiness of God and have to be removed from God's presence. Notice that God says the priest has to wear this uniform with the bells "so that he will not die."
- C. But the bells and pomegranates teach us something else as well.
- D. Which matters to God more, faithfulness or fruitfulness? Does God care more about us serving well or serving in a way that produces good things? If you read the Bible, you'll see that God actually cares deeply about both. I believe that the pomegranates and bells represent both. The pomegranates are fruit and symbolize producing fruit for God. The bells would sound as the priest moved to and fro serving the Lord.
- E. The key to being fruitful is to be faithful. The key to staying faithful is to be fruitful. This is the concern of any priest. Are we serving God well? Are we producing fruit for Him well?

## VI. Conclusion and Application